

REAL RESULTS: A USDA MID-TERM REVIEW

A look at USDA Policy from 2001-2002

President George W. Bush has said, "Agriculture is the cornerstone of our economy. The strength of agriculture contributes to the strength of this nation." Accordingly, the President and Secretary of Agriculture Ann M. Veneman have worked to strengthen America's food and agriculture system for the benefit of farmers and ranchers, rural communities, the environment and the American consumer.

- ☑ **Expanding Agricultural Trade:** In support of President Bush's continuing commitment to expanding trade opportunities for America's farmers and ranchers, USDA has worked with other agencies in the Administration to help negotiate new trade agreements, resolve agricultural trade disputes and promote U.S. food and agricultural products abroad. Secretary Veneman and U.S. Trade Representative Robert Zoellick led the U.S. delegation to the Doha to launch the new round of world trade negotiations. In conjunction with USTR, USDA developed a bold and visionary proposal for the WTO negotiations that would eliminate export subsidies and significantly reduce market access barriers and trade distorting domestic support worldwide. To further expand market opportunities for U.S. food and agricultural products, USDA is continuing to work with USTR to negotiate free trade agreements with Morocco, Australia, the countries in Central America, and the countries in Southern Africa. Negotiations with Singapore and Chile have been concluded. In addition, the Administration continues efforts to expand hemispheric trade with the Free Trade Area of the Americas. USDA also worked vigorously to preserve existing markets by resolving numerous trade disputes - such as Russia's ban on U.S. poultry imports and China's restrictions on soybean imports - affecting more than \$1.1 billion in trade. To help promote U.S. sales abroad, USDA allocated \$100 million in funding under the 2002 Market Access Program to 67 trade organizations to market U.S. products and expand food and agricultural exports.
- ☑ **Rapid Implementation of the 2002 Farm Bill:** Upon passage of the 2002 Farm Bill, which provided an important safety net for producers, President Bush and Secretary Veneman initiated an aggressive strategy goal of rapidly providing benefits to the nation's farmers, ranchers and producers. USDA implemented major commodity and farm programs in record time providing billions in benefits to producers. Additional major components of the 2002 Farm Bill, such as new conservation measures, food and nutrition programs, rural infrastructure funding, and others, are being quickly put to work for American producers and consumers.
- ☑ **Providing Historical Increases for Conservation Funding and Protecting Natural Resources:** Understanding that farmers are the best stewards of the land, the President called for historic increases in conservation efforts - and a new focus on working lands. As a result, the 2002 Farm Bill included the most significant investment in conservation in history -- an 80 percent increase in funding with a strong focus on helping farmers to conserve the soil, water and air on their lands in production. The reach of USDA's conservation services will also be greatly enhanced by a new provision that allows technical services to be provided by private sector, non-profit or state and local government providers. USDA has also partnered with several states to establish and strengthen Conservation Reserve Enhancement Programs (CREP), which are helping further protect and conserve the environment.
- ☑ **Safeguarding America's Homeland:** In the aftermath of Sept. 11, 2001, the Bush Administration strengthened programs aimed at securing the Nation's food and agriculture infrastructure from terrorist attack. USDA has increased by fifty percent the number of agricultural border inspectors, provided states with additional resources for bioterrorism prevention, implemented aggressive new security protocols, dramatically stepped up laboratory renovations, increased vital research, conducted planning exercises, and increased educational activities. In conjunction with the new Department of Homeland Security, USDA will continue its vigilance for rapid response and detection of animal and crop disease outbreaks and pest infestations.
- ☑ **Unprecedented Funding for a Food and Nutrition Safety Net:** Strengthening America's food and nutrition safety net for the most vulnerable in our society has been a top priority of the Bush Administration. In reauthorizing the Food Stamp Program, \$6.4 billion in new funding for nutrition assistance programs was secured, including restoration of food stamp eligibility for legal immigrants who have been in the U.S. for at least five years. Delivery of food stamps has also been improved and fraud reduced, with nearly 90 percent receiving benefits through electronic benefits transfer. USDA has also been a strong partner in President Bush's *HealthierUS* initiative by expanding the national "5-A-Day" campaign and working through the National School Lunch and the Women, Infants and Children (WIC), programs to encourage more physical activity and balanced diets to combat obesity.

- ☑ **Ensuring A Safe and Wholesome Food Supply:** Working to protect American consumers from food-borne illnesses, the Bush Administration proposed record level funding for food safety programs in its first two budgets, increasing the number of inspectors and strengthening inspection systems. USDA has worked to ensure regulatory compliance and has used sound science to guide food safety policies. USDA has strengthened rules and regulations regarding E. coli O157:H7, and Listeria monocytogenes has conducted a series of scientific symposiums designed to examine current policies and consider additional measures to maintain a strong and effective food safety system.
- ☑ **Creating Jobs and Economic Investment in America's Rural Communities:** In implementing President Bush's vision for job creation and economic development, USDA's rural development programs have helped create or save more than 160,000 jobs in rural America during the past two years. Major investments have been made in developing value-added industries, with a focus on promoting renewable energy. Rural infrastructure, such as education, healthcare, telecommunications, water treatment and community facilities, has been supported by more than \$12 billion in grants and loans. More than \$8 billion has been invested in rural housing, much of which supports the President's ambitious goal to increase minority homeownership by 5.5 million by 2010.
- ☑ **Strengthening Forest Health:** Decades of neglecting forest health -- and the lack of a national forest health plan -- have resulted in countless forests filled with hazardous fuels that heighten the risk of catastrophic wildfire. To protect families, communities and America's natural treasures from a repeat of the record-setting fire season of 2002, President Bush has introduced a bold *Healthy Forests Initiative* to improve overall forest health and reduce the risk of catastrophic fire. Secretary Veneman and Interior Secretary Norton are working together to streamline regulatory processes to ensure more timely decisions, greater efficiency and better results in restoring forest health to implement aspects of this initiative.
- ☑ **Advancing Renewable Fuels and Bioenergy to Meet America's Energy Needs:** One of the first major initiatives of the Bush Administration was the *President's National Energy Plan*, which included a fundamental commitment to renewable fuels and bioenergy. The 2002 Farm Bill was the first farm bill in history to contain an energy title, which included additional support for developing viable industries for bioproducts and bioenergy such as ethanol, biodiesel and other means by which to use agricultural products and byproducts to produce clean, renewable energy. The Administration continues to support passage of an Energy Bill that would provide additional incentives for agricultural-related energy sources.
- ☑ **Assessing the "State of American Agriculture":** Believing that a solid vision should drive agricultural policy, Secretary Veneman issued a comprehensive policy report entitled Food and Agricultural Policy: Taking Stock for the New Century. The report highlighted the fact that farmers and ranchers operate in a global, technologically advanced, diversified and highly competitive business environment that is driven by consumer demands. It also identified challenges, including confronting and managing the change immediately facing agriculture, while at the same time modernizing the farm and food system infrastructure to ensure continued growth and development. The report formulates a long-term view of the Nation's agriculture and food system and offers recommendations and policy guidance.
- ☑ **Responding to National Drought and Natural Disasters:** Several years of unseasonably dry conditions in many parts of the country have seriously affected many farmers and ranchers. Using every available tool, the Bush Administration mobilized effective drought relief, providing over \$900 million for the new Livestock Compensation Program to support livestock producers who lack the risk management tools of other producers. Expediting disaster declarations, opening Conservation Reserve Program acres to emergency haying and grazing, and other innovative actions were taken to support producers impacted by drought. Because of reforms to crop insurance and effective implementation, a record level of U.S. crops are now insured - almost 80 percent of eligible acreage - providing nearly \$4.4 billion in payments production lost during 2002 due to drought and natural disaster.
- ☑ **Strengthening Civil Rights Protections for USDA Customers and Employees:** Recognizing past deficiencies, the Bush Administration has put a priority on ensuring that USDA deals equitably with all of its customers, particularly minorities. Since taking office, Secretary Veneman has helped place new emphasis on USDA's civil rights efforts, worked to reduce the backlog of complaints, and developed a comprehensive plan to strengthen programs aimed at helping minority and disadvantaged farmers. USDA has also partnered with minority organizations to increase outreach, training and mediation.
- ☑ **Encouraging Service and a New Generation of Leaders:** Answering President Bush's call for the federal government to take an active role in promoting service among citizens and youth, Secretary Veneman created USDA's Leaders of Tomorrow program. Designed to inspire a new generation of agricultural leaders, the program encourages community involvement, careers in public service and the food sector, and agricultural education. As she travels throughout the country, the Secretary serves as a mentor to 4-H, FFA and other youth by including them in events, meetings and other activities.